

ETCHING PROCESS FOR A TWO-LAYER METALLIZATION

5 Cross-Reference to Related Application:

This application is a continuation of copending International Application No. PCT/EP00/07784, filed August 10, 2000, which designated the United States.

10 Background of the Invention:

Field of the Invention:

20 The invention lies in the semiconductor processing field. More specifically, the invention relates to an etching process for a two-layer metallization or dual damascene patterning for a semiconductor structure having functional elements formed in a substrate, a dielectric situated on the substrate, for example an oxide layer, and the etching mask comprising a photoresist and a polymer intermediate layer being inserted between the etching mask and the oxide layer.

25 Semiconductor structures are generally equipped with a multilevel metallization with corresponding interconnects which are connected via vertical intermediate connections to one another and/or to active or doped elements of the semiconductor structure. The interconnects and the intermediate connections are fabricated in a plurality of

process steps which comprise deposition, patterning and etching steps.

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5 A customary method for fabricating a two-level metallization consists firstly in fabricating a connection to individual functional elements of the semiconductor structure. To that end, with the aid of a photolithographic process followed by an etching step, an opening is produced through the oxide layer situated on the semiconductor structure, thereby

10 defining the position of the intermediate connection in the first metallization plane. This opening, which extends vertically through the semiconductor structure, is subsequently filled with a thin adhesion layer, e.g. titanium nitride, and a metal, e.g. tungsten, in a deposition process, e.g. a CVD or sputtering method. Since the deposition process cannot be limited just to the opening, rather deposition is effected on the entire surface of the semiconductor structure, the excess metal on the surface must be removed for example by

20 means of a so-called CMP process (chemical mechanical polishing) or by etching-back. Afterward, a metallization, e.g. made of aluminum, is applied on the oxide layer present and is then patterned photolithographically in order to produce the desired interconnect structure. That is done by applying a photoresist from which a photoresist etching mask

25 is formed photolithographically, so that etching can then be

effected through the etching mask and, finally, the interconnects remain.

In a preferred variant, an oxide layer is applied over the whole area in a planar manner and the negative of the interconnects is produced in the oxide layer by firstly applying a photoresist on the latter, which photoresist is then patterned photolithographically. Afterward, the negative structure of the interconnects is etched into the oxide layer through the openings in the photoresist. In a further step, the negative structure is then filled with a liner and then with a metal, e.g. aluminum or copper. The excess metal is then likewise removed by means of a CMP process step.

U.S. Patent No. 5,801,094, by way of example, describes a dual damascene method wherein the metallization of the intermediate connections between structural elements of the semiconductor structure and an interconnect plane and the metallization of the interconnects of the interconnect plane are effected in one step. However, the preparatory method steps are still complicated. Thus, firstly an oxide layer as dielectric is applied on the substrate and then an etching stop layer is applied. Openings are etched into the etching stop layer at the locations at which intermediate connections are to be realized, after the photolithographic application of an etching mask, with the result that the underlying oxide layer

is uncovered. A further oxide layer as carrier for the interconnects of a metallization plane is then applied on the etching stop layer. The patterning of the negative form of the interconnects within the upper oxide layer and of the negative
5 form for the intermediate connections is effected with the aid of photolithography and subsequent etching. During the etching operation, openings are etched into the upper oxide layer in accordance with the etching mask either until the etching stop layer is reached or, at the locations where the etching stop layer is interrupted for the realization of the intermediate connections in the via, as far as the underlying interconnects to be contact-connected or as far as the substrate (self-aligned dual damascene).

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15 After the removal of the etching mask, the metallization can then be effected by filling the trenches for the interconnects and also the openings for the intermediate connections simultaneously with metal, metal also being deposited on the rest of the surface. Accordingly, the surface must also be
20 planarized afterward, e.g. by means of a CMP (chemical mechanical polishing) process.

Furthermore, a method is known wherein the intermediate connections are patterned in a first process step
25 (photolithography and etching process) and the interconnects are formed in a subsequent process step (photolithography and

etching process) (sequential dual damascene). A photolithography method is used for this as standard, wherein method an intermediate layer made of a polymer, i.e. an ARC polymer as antireflection layer, is inserted below the photoresist layer in order to preclude reflections during the exposure of the photoresist and hence to minimize the reflected light and thereby to improve the resolution. This involves a standard photo-process for sub-0.5 mm technologies with DUV (deep ultraviolet) exposure. Antireflection layers of this type may comprise organic or inorganic materials.

However, in the process - which is effected after the photolithographic step for forming the etching mask - of etching for the purpose of opening the oxide layer in order to form e.g. a trench, this intermediate layer leads to problems. The ARC polymer layer is not opened during the photolithographic process. Therefore, the etching process for patterning the interconnects must begin with an ARC etching step (polymer etch). The second step is then the oxide etching step (normal two-step process). The problem here is that the contact holes that have already been opened are/have been filled with the ARC polymer.

In this case, fence formation is unavoidable. A fence is to be understood as a comparatively sharp-edged rim which projects as residue of the intermediate layer and at least partly

surrounds the opening etched into the oxide layer. However,
during a subsequent metallization step, such fences make it
more difficult to fill the trench and enable mechanical
stresses to proceed from the fences. In particular, such
5 fences are a disturbance during Al deposition by sputtering.

It has previously been attempted to avoid fence formation
through an increased addition of oxygen during the
interconnect etching process, as a result of which the build-
up of a protective sidewall polymer layer can be suppressed.
On the other hand, at the same time the photoresist sidewall
is no longer passivated to a sufficient extent as a result,
with the consequence that the critical dimension is widened.
Another solution approach would be to employ hard mask
patterning, but this is impracticable owing to the increased
process complexity.

Summary of the Invention:

It is accordingly an object of the invention to provide an
20 etching process for a two-layer metallization, which overcomes
the above-mentioned disadvantages of the heretofore-known
devices and methods of this general type and which is simple
and cost-effective to carry out and reliably prevents fences
from being formed during the etching process and which equally
25 satisfies the requirements made of a good ARC open process.

With the foregoing and other objects in view there is provided, in accordance with the invention, an etching method for a dual-layer metallization, that is in a dual damascene patterning process. The method comprises:

5 providing a semiconductor structure with functional elements formed in a substrate, a dielectric, such as an oxide disposed on the substrate, a photoresist etching mask above the dielectric, and a polymer intermediate layer between the etching mask and the dielectric layer;

etching the dielectric layer and the polymer intermediate layer for the dual damascene patterning with a CF_4 ARC open process with high selectivity with respect to the photoresist of the etching mask.

15 In accordance with an added feature of the invention, the etching time, depending on an etching depth, is set to approximately 140 s.

In accordance with an additional feature of the invention, the
20 etching process is performed with an RF power of approximately 600 watts.

With the above and other objects in view there is also provided, in accordance with the invention, an etching process

for oxide patterning in a semiconductor structure, which comprises:

providing a substrate with functional elements formed therein, an oxide layer on the substrate, an etching mask formed of a photoresist above the oxide layer, and a polymer intermediate layer forming an antireflection layer between the etching mask and the oxide layer;

patterning the oxide layer during a dual damascene patterning for a metallization;

etching the polymer intermediate layer and the oxide layer in a common CF_4/CHF_3 etching process with high selectivity with respect to the photoresist; and

thereby adjusting an etching gas flow for CF_4 to 35 - 45 sccm (preferably approximately 40 sccm) and an etching gas flow for CHF_3 to 17 - 23 sccm (preferably approximately 20 sccm) in the common etching process.

In accordance with a further feature of the invention, oxygen gas and argon gas are added to the etching gases, and the gas flow of argon is set to 80 - 120 sccm and the gas flow of oxygen is set to 5 - 7 sccm.

In other words, the objects of the invention are achieved by virtue of the fact that the etching of the oxide layer and of the polymer intermediate layer for the dual damascene patterning is effected by means of a CF_4 ARC open process with high selectivity with respect to the photoresist with a lengthened etching time.

One advantage of this etching process according to the invention is to be seen in that the polymers in the via are etched at the same time as the oxide to trench depth, so that no fences can be formed. ARC open etching and oxide etching are effected in one step in order to pattern the interconnects in a manner free of fences. This makes it possible to perform the dual damascene patterning with a cost-effective etching process which is simple to implement in production, at the same time an etching profile being obtained which facilitates the use of cost-effective PVD metal filling methods.

Furthermore, the etching time is at least doubled compared with a conventional O_2/N_2 ARC open process, so that the polymers in the via can be reduced. The etching time is preferably approximately 140 seconds, depending on the other process parameters.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment, the entire etching process is effected in an etching chamber with plasma

assistance, the RF power preferably being approximately 600 watts.

In accordance with a concomitant feature of the invention, the
5 CF₄ ARC open/oxide process is assisted by a proportion of CHF₃,
the CF₄ flow during the ARC open/oxide process being set to
approximately 40 sccm and the CHF₃ flow being set to
approximately 20 sccm.

Other features which are considered as characteristic for the
invention are set forth in the appended claims.

Although the invention is illustrated and described herein as
embodied in a etching process for a two-layer metallization,
it is nevertheless not intended to be limited to the details
shown, since various modifications and structural changes may
be made therein without departing from the spirit of the
invention and within the scope and range of equivalents of the
claims.

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The construction and method of operation of the invention,
however, together with additional objects and advantages
thereof will be best understood from the following description
of specific embodiments when read in connection with the
25 accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawing:

Fig. 1 is a diagrammatic detail from a semiconductor structure with a prepared etching mask and a polymer layer situated between an oxide layer and the etching mask; and

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Fig. 2 is a detail of a semiconductor structure with a two-layer metallization, comprising an interconnect plane and an intermediate connection between the interconnect plane and the substrate of the semiconductor structure.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments:

Referring now to the figures of the drawing in detail and first, particularly, to Fig. 1 thereof, there is shown a detail from a semiconductor structure with a substrate 1 made of silicon with a doped region 2 situated therein. The doped region 2 of the diagram represents a functional element of the semiconductor structure. Situated above the substrate 1 is an oxide layer 3, which is formed with an opening 9 for accommodating a metallization 8 and which, as intermediate connection 6, connects the doped region 2 to an interconnect plane 7 (Fig. 2).

The opening 9 is fabricated with the aid of the etching process described below. To that end, firstly a polymer intermediate layer 4 is applied on the oxide layer 3 and an etching mask 5, comprising a photoresist, is fabricated on the

polymer intermediate layer 4 with a conventional photolithographic method. The polymer intermediate layer 4 is intended to prevent or reduce reflections during the exposure of the photoresist. During the subsequent etching-through of the oxide layer 3, it is necessary firstly to remove the polymer intermediate layer 4. That is done by the CF₄ ARC open process, which has a significantly higher selectivity with respect to the photoresist.

Furthermore, the etching time is at least doubled compared with a conventional O₂/N₂ ARC open process, so that oxide and polymers can be etched to trench depth.

The following parameters are particularly favorable for the CF₄ ARC open etching process in order to achieve a trench etching without the formation of fences:

Parameter	Value	Unit
Power	550 ... 650 (600)	watts
Pressure	80 ... 120 (100)	mTorr
He backside pressure	26	Torr
Magnetic field	0	Gauss
CF ₄ flow	35 ... 45 (40)	sccm /*
CHF ₃ flow	17 ... 23 (20)	sccm /*
O ₂	5 ... 7 (6)	sccm /*
Ar	80 ... 120 (100)	sccm /*
Etching time	140	seconds

/* Gas flow

The values specified in parentheses are exemplary recommended values which are variable within the limits specified.

- 5 After running through the ARC open etching process with the specified parameters, it is then possible for the metallization to be effected by filling the opening 9 in the oxide by means of a PVD filling method as usual, the desired intermediate connection 6 between the doped region 2 and the interconnect plane 7 and the latter itself simultaneously being fabricated.